HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

45th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

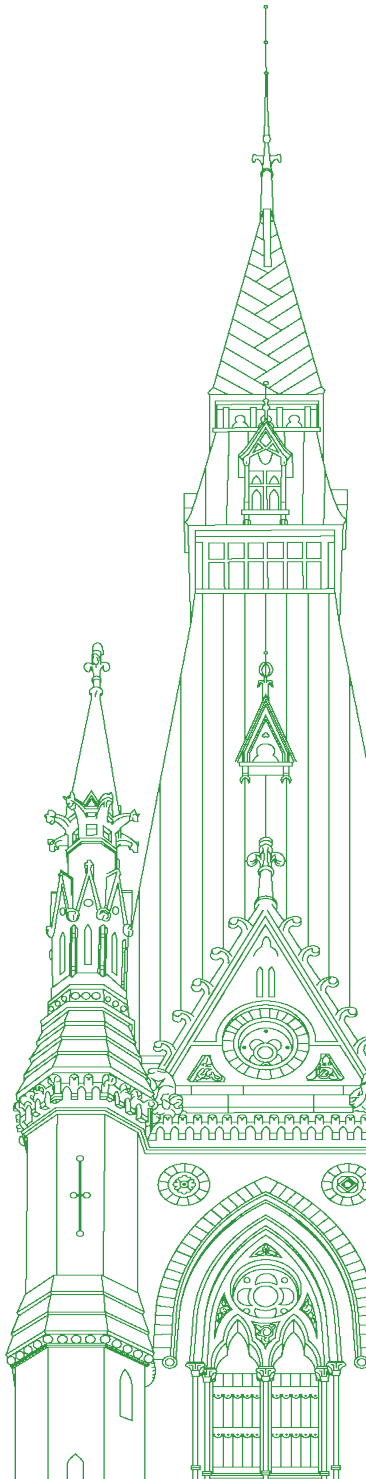
Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 035

PUBLIC PART ONLY - PARTIE PUBLIQUE SEULEMENT

Tuesday, May 26, 2026



Chair: Ahmed Hussen

Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development

Tuesday, May 26, 2026

● (1540)

[*English*]

The Chair (Hon. Ahmed Hussen (York South—Weston—Etobicoke, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 35 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Thursday, February 12, 2026, the committee is meeting for its review of Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines on the cards on the table. These measures are put in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including the interpreters. You will notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking.

For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking.

I would now like to welcome our witnesses for the first hour.

We have Dr. Scott Simon, full professor at the school of sociological and anthropological studies in the faculty of social sciences at the University of Ottawa. We have Jonathan Berkshire Miller, senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier Institute. From the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, we have Vina Nadjibulla, vice-president of research and strategy.

Up to five minutes will be provided for opening remarks, after which we will proceed to rounds of questions from members.

I now invite Dr. Simon to make an opening statement of no more than five minutes. Welcome.

[*Translation*]

Scott Simon (Full Professor, School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, University Of Ottawa, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

[*English*]

I am thankful for this chance to come here today.

The geopolitical context has changed drastically since the Indo-Pacific strategy was written, but fundamental realities remain, including challenges related to China, as evidenced by China's external aggression and internal oppression of minorities.

Japan, Canada's close partner, is very clear about the source of threats, as documented in its annual defence report. Canada's strategy prioritizes Japan. In March, our prime ministers announced a comprehensive strategic partnership. One result is Canada's participation with Japan, the Philippines and other partners in the BALIKATAN maritime exercise this spring. This is not unrelated to Taiwan, which is 111 kilometres from Japan's Yonaguni Island.

The IPS promised to “grow...ties with Taiwan while supporting its resilience.” Taiwan is crucial to our economic security as a supplier of advanced semiconductors, contributing to industries from AI in Vancouver to automobiles in Ontario. Canada and Taiwan signed a foreign investment arrangement in 2023, and a bilateral trade agreement awaits final signature.

Since 2022, China has conducted six large-scale military exercises around Taiwan, including missiles launched into Japan's EEZ. China's military now repeatedly crosses the median line between China and Taiwan. China has also escalated incursions into Japanese waters and airspace. China is conducting a global campaign accusing Japan of resurrecting neo-militarism and threatening regional security.

This year, China implemented new sanctions against Japan, including export controls on rare earth minerals. It sanctioned Keiji Furuya, the head of a parliamentary friendship association, for visiting Taiwan. Last month, China denounced Japan at the UN Security Council for a Taiwan Strait transit.

China dismisses international appeals for peace and threatens countries that provide even moral support to democratic Taiwan. China coerces Canada. Last month, envoy Wang Di warned that our strategic partnership would be damaged if Canada keeps sending warships through the Taiwan Strait and parliamentarians to Taiwan. China wants Canada to treat Taiwan as a red line that should never be crossed, but if we obey this new request, we would diverge from our own policy, which has taken note of China's claim since 1970 while neither endorsing it nor challenging it. Compliance would make Canada complicit in suppressing Taiwan.

The Taiwan Strait, which is 126 kilometres wide at its narrowest point, is an international waterway. Canadian warships have transited 11 times since 2018. To put that into perspective, Chinese warships regularly pass through the Tsugaru Strait, which is 20 kilometres at its narrowest point, between Hokkaido and Honshu.

Parliamentary visits from Canada to Taiwan began in 1974, and a friendship group was established in 1982. Because legislators represent their constituents, parliamentary visits are people-to-people ties that neither endorse nor challenge China's claims.

China is not a market economy, and its non-market policies and practices undermine the foundation of a global free trade system. China's strategy is to flood the world's markets with cheap products, enabled by heavy subsidies, and dominate strategic industrial sectors. We must protect our industries and jobs for Canadians if we are to prosper for the rest of the century.

Canada's Indo-Pacific presence requires pragmatic realism and clarity about which states uphold our freedom, prosperity and shared values versus those that threaten our collective security. We must choose between a free, open Pacific and great power coercion.

I have four suggestions to present today.

Number one is that Canada should publicly support Japan, pushing back against China's unfounded accusations while addressing sanctions by strengthening supply chains.

Number two is that Canada should continue and strengthen defence and security collaboration with Japan, informing our own population about its importance to Canada.

Number three is that Canada should strengthen its commitment to supporting Taiwan's resilience. We must continue both Taiwan Strait transits and interparliamentary diplomacy. We should not delay the completion of the bilateral trade co-operation framework agreement.

Finally, number four is that Canada should work with allies and friends to address the non-market policies and practices of China and avoid becoming an economic enabler for China, even as it pursues its own export interests.

Thank you for your attention.

● (1545)

The Chair: I now invite Mr. Berkshire Miller to make an opening statement.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller (Senior Fellow, Macdonald-Laurier Institute, As an Individual): Thank you, Chair and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear before you.

At its launch in 2022, Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy was a necessary and, in my view, overdue step, aligning Canadian foreign policy with the world's most consequential region. The task now is not to rewrite the IPS but to refresh it, building on its strengths while adapting it to a more complex and interconnected strategic environment.

One area for refinement is the strategy's framing of that environment. The IPS was designed at a time when it was still possible, at least conceptually, to think of regions and policy domains as more distinct than they are today. That is simply no longer the case. Geographically, the threats that Canada faces are increasingly interconnected across the Indo-Pacific, the transatlantic and the Arctic.

Russia's war in Ukraine is not confined to Europe. It is sustained by Chinese economic support and North Korean materiel while Moscow continues to project power in the Pacific and the Arctic. China, for its part, is now a self-declared near-Arctic state, investing in infrastructure, research and dual-use capabilities that have direct implications for Canada's northern security. Meanwhile, Indo-Pacific partners, such as Japan and South Korea, are more deeply engaged in NATO discussions than ever before. These are not separate theatres. They are part of a single, evolving strategic system.

Canada is uniquely positioned at the intersection of these spaces, but that position requires a more integrated approach. The IPS and a refresh of the IPS should more explicitly connect Canada's Indo-Pacific engagement with its transatlantic and Arctic regions, ensuring that policy, planning and resource allocation reflect the reality of these linkages.

Equally important is the need to move beyond the long-standing and increasingly outdated distinction between economic and security policy. For too long, Canadian policy has operated on the assumption that trade, investment and economic engagement can be pursued largely in isolation from national security considerations. That assumption is no longer tenable.

Economic relations are now a primary vector of strategic competition. Supply chains can be leveraged for coercion. Investment flows can create dependencies with security implications. Critical technologies, whether in telecommunications, artificial intelligence or critical minerals, sit at the intersection of economic opportunity and national security risk. The idea that Canada can engage economically without accounting for these dynamics is not simply outdated. It is strategically unsound.

A refreshed IPS should explicitly reject this false bifurcation. Economic policy must be understood as security policy. This does not, of course, mean disengagement. It means discipline. It means ensuring that diversification strategies enhance resilience rather than simply shifting exposure. It means aligning investment screening, export controls and industrial policy with trusted partners, and it means being clear-eyed about the risks inherent in deeper economic integration with actors whose strategic interests may diverge from our own.

Within this broader context, the IPS would also benefit from greater clarity in its approach to China. The strategy rightly adopted a balanced framework, in my view, recognizing China as a disruptive actor but also one that we need to engage with through dialogue and confined co-operation.

China's actions—from coercive behaviour in maritime domains, as Dr. Simon mentioned, to economic retaliation and growing military pressure in the Taiwan Strait—have become defining features of the regional security landscape. Canada should and must respond with a posture that is steady, principled and predictable, competing when necessary, co-operating when possible and defending its interests without hesitation.

This is particularly important in the context of Taiwan. Canada's long-standing position in support of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait is sound, but it is too often implemented with excessive caution. There remains a tendency to self-censor engagement with Taiwan in an effort to pre-empt negative reactions from Beijing. Over time, this risks creating a pattern of incremental concession that is neither required by policy nor aligned with Canada's interests.

In closing, I'll give a few recommendations.

Canada should reinforce the IPS's continuity across political cycles through formal mechanisms and signal long-term commitment. In addition, Canada should continue to focus its security contributions on areas of comparative advantage, including maritime domain awareness, cyber-capabilities and specialized training.

● (1550)

There is also economic diversification, and this is an important one. Efforts should be deepened with an emphasis on resilience and shared interests, ensuring that new partnerships are structured with security considerations in mind.

In closing, the IPS remains a strong foundation for Canada's engagement in the Indo-Pacific. The next stage is about refinement and action—ensuring that the strategy reflects the interconnected nature of today's threats, the inseparability of economic and security policies, and the need for a consistent approach.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We'll go next to Ms. Nadjibulla.

Vina Nadjibulla (Vice-President, Research and Strategy, Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada): Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for the invitation to appear before you today.

I have submitted a longer written statement with 13 recommendations, so I will use my opening remarks to make five broad points.

First, the Indo-Pacific strategy on balance has delivered real progress. Canada is more present, more visible and more connected to regional networks than at any time in recent memory, but presence is a means, not an end. The test now is whether Canada can turn its expanded presence in the region into real gains for Canadian prosperity, security and influence.

Second, the strategy has made a real difference, but the world has changed substantially since its launch. The government should therefore move quickly towards an Indo-Pacific strategy phase two, and this should be an evolution, not a reinvention. We should not be starting from scratch, but the next phase of the strategy should be revised to have fewer priorities, additional dedicated resources and clearer, measurable outcomes.

Economic resilience should be its organizing logic. Diversification in particular should not simply mean more trade or more exports. It should mean deeper and more resilient Canadian positions in critical supply chains such as around energy, critical minerals, clean technology, AI and quantum.

Third, the China and Taiwan chapters need to be updated. We've heard a lot about that already, but let me note that the IPS identified China as an increasingly disruptive global power and that assessment holds true today. While the diagnosis remains relevant, Canada's approach to managing relations with China must evolve to reflect the broader shifts in the global order and our priority on independence and room for manoeuvre.

The government's recalibration towards selective engagement with China is necessary, but selective engagement cannot become quiet accommodation. It must not mean political acquiescence, self-censorship or softening of Canada's own values, rules and laws. It must be interest-based, disciplined and bounded by clear guardrails. The guardrails have to be specific and deal with issues of foreign interference, transnational repression, forced labour, cyber-threats, investment screening, research security, sensitive technologies, critical infrastructure, data governance and supply chain integrity. We need that level of disaggregated guardrails.

Canada's substantive relationship with Taiwan should not be reduced or treated as a bargaining chip in our recalibration with China. Canada's one China policy provides ample room for practical engagement with Taiwan, and that space should be used with confidence. Canada should move forward with practical co-operation, including by signing the long-negotiated trade facilitation arrangement, and continue Taiwan's trade transit with allies and partners as part of our broader commitment to international law, freedom of navigation and regional stability. We should make such transits public.

Fourth, the next phase of the strategy needs much stronger language around the energy, technology and services agendas. Canada can be more relevant to the Indo-Pacific if it is seen as a reliable provider of both conventional and clean energy. LNG, LPG, uranium and critical minerals should all be treated not only as commercial opportunities but as strategic assets. Energy security can be a lever of Canadian influence and relevance in the region.

The strategy should also elevate digital trade and services, as well as university partnerships and research and technology partnerships. Too much of Canada's Indo-Pacific economic conversation still focuses on exports of goods. These are essential, but many of the fastest-growing opportunities are in services, digital infrastructure, AI, quantum, education, research partnerships and talent mobility. Canada's university and colleges are strategic assets in the region and should be treated that way.

Fifth, the Indo-Pacific strategy must be linked to a broader Canadian foreign policy strategy, national security strategy and Canada's domestic economic resilience. Canada's regional and thematic strategies cannot sit as separate boxes. The Indo-Pacific strategy, the Arctic policy, the Africa strategy and various development policies all need to serve a common purpose.

Finally, implementation should be measured by outcomes, not activity. Meetings, missions and announcements matter only if they produce results. The government should publish an annual IPS scorecard that measures market access secured, investments attracted, supply chains strengthened, security capabilities delivered, partnerships institutionalized and regulatory barriers removed.

● (1555)

In conclusion, Mr. Chair, Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy helped Canada show up in the region. The next phase must ensure that Canada matters—as a relevant, effective and consequential partner in the region that will shape Canada's prosperity, security and sovereignty for decades to come.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your statement.

We will go next to questions from members.

We will begin with MP Michael Chong for six minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills North, CPC): Thank you to our witnesses for appearing today.

I have taken note of all of your opening comments about the fact that Japan has been prioritized in the Indo-Pacific strategy, about the need for more interconnectivity between the different pillars in the Indo-Pacific strategy and about the need not to engage in quiet accommodation but to robustly indicate what we stand for as a country.

I want to focus on the importance of peace and security in the region as a foundation for trade and investment. The Government of Canada has talked a lot about the need to diversify trade and investment in the region. It would be interesting to hear your perspectives on how important it is to maintain peace and stability in the region and to ensure that the PRC does not take unilateral action, in whatever form it takes, against Taiwan.

Go ahead, Ms. Nadjibulla.

Vina Nadjibulla: I'm happy to start. Thank you.

It's absolutely critical for Canada to be seen as a stakeholder in the stability of the region and not just as a distant actor interested in trade and exports of goods. Right now, especially given the questions around the U.S.'s continued presence in the region, it's even more important for Canada, along with Japan, Australia and many Southeast Asian countries such as South Korea, to do more together.

Canada, of course, cannot be the major provider of hardware and a lot of resources, but it can be a very consequential provider of niche technologies, especially when it comes to such things as maritime domain awareness. For instance, our dark vessel detection program, which has been much celebrated, is something we're bringing to the region. That needs to continue.

In addition to providing those niche technologies, Canada can also be an important actor in defence diplomacy, in standing firm on principles that matter to us in terms of freedom of navigation and in terms of calling out actions that are violating our partners and allies in the region.

My answer would be that there is no way for us to engage economically without also being seen as a stakeholder in the stability of the region.

● (1600)

Hon. Michael Chong: Would you say that your recommendation that Canada not engage in quiet accommodation is reflected in the actions of heads of government such as those of Japan and the Philippines?

I take note that in November, Prime Minister Takaichi of Japan said very plainly that if the PRC were to take unilateral action against Taiwan, such as a naval blockade or a military action, this could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" and an existential crisis for Japan. What she was essentially saying is that under Japanese law, Japan's military would be activated to respond to the PRC threat against Taiwan.

Last week, the Philippine President made similar comments.

Do you see that as an embodiment or an example of clearly stating a country's position in the Indo-Pacific region as a way to ensure peace and stability in the region and to make it clear to the PRC about the high cost of any unilateral action?

Vina Nadjibulla: I'll start, but I'll invite my colleagues to reply as well.

Both the Prime Minister of Japan and the President of Philippines are stating facts, Mr. Chair. They are essentially observing what's happening in the region, and they are calling out those developments.

It so happens that the PRC sees this as an escalation, and there is coercion in response to that.

In the face of this kind of coercion and bullying, we have two choices. We can back down, or we can continue to speak truth and continue to mobilize. The domestic audience is important here. I was in Philippines at the time that President Marcos made that comment. It speaks to the domestic audience even more so than to the international audience. It's recognizing the actual threat environment and what's at stake, and it's making sure that the population is not naive about the security environment.

Hon. Michael Chong: I will reframe the question.

Do you believe, paradoxically, that public comments—rather than quiet accommodation—made by the Prime Minister of Japan and by the President of the Philippines actually increase the long-term chances of peace and stability in the region? Through your recommendation, you would seem to suggest that there not be quiet accommodation.

Vina Nadjibulla: I think there's a balance for both. There is room for diplomacy and making sure there are channels for communication and building as much trust as possible. Certainly, Japan and the Philippines and others, being much closer to China, have spent decades developing those mechanisms. Sometimes, there's also an important role for democratically elected leaders to speak honestly in their own parliaments with their own populations. Both have to happen. Sometimes that creates friction, and we have to manage that.

There is a line between making performative statements that arguably can be seen as escalatory—for instance, high-profile individuals visiting Taiwan—and making statements within your own parliament or to your own population that are simply factual. They should not be seen in the same way. There is a balance between megaphone diplomacy and trust-building.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: Can I respond to that?

Hon. Michael Chong: Yes.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: Very quickly, I would agree with everything Vina mentioned, but I would say that China in particular took advantage of the opportunity in Prime Minister Takaichi's comments. This was not a change in Japan's policy. This comment that was made was not about intervening in a Taiwan contingency, to potentially get involved with the PRC, but was actually to protect its alliance and its alliance structure with the United States. In Japan's laws, it has to protect its alliance. This is called collective self-defence. China knows this very well and took advantage of those comments for its own purposes.

As for your first question, on peace and security and where that falls, I think it's a prerequisite. Think of a poker game and putting your ante in: You have to be talking about peace and security in this part of the world. That's why I mentioned in my opening comments that you can't bifurcate this. It doesn't mean securitizing everything, but you cannot walk into Seoul, Hanoi, Tokyo, Taipei or wherever and talk about the economy anymore. Security is baseline. That is a baseline understanding. It's been that way for a while. If we expect economic dividends and trade dividends, I think we have to be there for the national security side. We don't have the same size military as the United States, but there are other ways we can do that.

The Chair: Thank you.

We go next to Rob Oliphant.

● (1605)

Hon. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): What was the time on that last round?

The Chair: We were over by 50 seconds.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Okay. I thought it was about a minute.

The Chair: He was ahead of schedule.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I want to make sure we share the minute.

I need an hour of my own.

Voices: Oh, oh!

Hon. Robert Oliphant: I want to cut through the coded language that all three of you used. It was guarded and coded. You all mentioned geopolitical changes and a new environment. What are you talking about? Please, I would invite each of you three to name the changes you see since the IPS was launched. Name names, if you need to.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: I can go first.

The first and most principal thing is Russia's revisionism and its war in Ukraine. Of course, the war started before the launch of the IPS, but we've seen a deepening of that conflict. We've seen a deepening of the relationship between Russia and the PRC, not only with China supporting Russia's invasion in Ukraine but also with joint exercises on the Pacific side of it. That's one side. It's just the deteriorating security environment in the transatlantic and how that impacts the Indo-Pacific partners.

The second part of this is that when we talk about Asia, it seems that we're talking only about China, but we also have other disruptive actors. We have North Korea, which I mentioned in my opening statement. We're seeing a greater convergence there between Russia, China and North Korea. We're seeing a very troubling sign in the relationship between Russia, which is still a Pacific state, and North Korea. We're seeing multiple vectors of a challenging security environment. While there may not be a great conflict in the Indo-Pacific right now, the tensions are quite significant across the spectrum.

Scott Simon: I would agree with that, but I want to add a few things.

A number of things have been going on since 2022. The first and most obvious one is the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The second one is the situation ever since October 7 and the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Then there's the question of Iran and the Strait of Hormuz, which shows us the danger of conflict in such an important waterway. The Taiwan Strait would be a much more serious situation, which is why it is an existential issue for Canada that peace and security be preserved in that region.

Finally, of course, there's the election of Donald Trump as President of the United States. Some of the things he has done—for example, around Ukraine—are of concern. There are a lot of issues about trust with Donald Trump, and I think that is an issue until the next election. That being said, the people in power in Russia and China will be there for a much longer time.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Meanwhile, they threaten our sovereignty, prosperity and resilience.

Scott Simon: Absolutely.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: That is what I thought you were talking about, but—

Scott Simon: That is what I was talking about, yes.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Vina, go ahead.

Vina Nadjibulla: Thank you.

For me, it is fundamentally about the changes that have happened in the U.S.—the election of President Trump and the fundamental change to the way the U.S. exercises its power and its relationships with allies. Obviously, there is a change in the Canada-U.S. relationship, which is necessitating a new approach to foreign policy by Canada, and a change in alliances more generally.

We're seeing this much more immediately in Europe, but that change is also coming to the Indo-Pacific. There is a lack of reliance on the U.S. alliance structure globally, including in the Indo-Pacific. The way Canada now has to exercise its own foreign policy, from the perspective of gaining strategic autonomy, diversifying and reducing its overreliance, necessitates having a new look at how the Indo-Pacific strategy is positioned.

That came in at the time of the Biden administration, when the alliance structure was at its strongest in many years. We're no longer there.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Our committee just travelled to Washington. We were there when President Trump went to China.

What is your read on that relationship? It is full of hostile rhetoric, but we see something quite different from hostile rhetoric in practice. I'm wondering about your takes on that.

We will start with Vina and go in reverse order.

Vina Nadjibulla: The most important outcome of that summit was the new framing of the U.S.-China relationship as a constructive, strategic stability. China would like to make this a long-term strategic shift, which essentially establishes a peer relationship on China's terms. There are many in the U.S. administration who are hoping this is a tactical moment. Putting President Trump aside, because it's difficult to interpret and understand what might be happening for him, many in the administration see this as a tactical moment of stability, which both sides will use to reinforce their own positions and have more self-reliance and de-risking. For the rest of us, this means it's also a moment when we need to focus on our own resilience and strength.

The relationship will likely be more stable for the foreseeable future, but let's not mistake that for having the structural issues resolved. They are not.

● (1610)

Scott Simon: I can add to that.

There is reason to be concerned about some of the comments Trump has made about Taiwan—about delaying the sale of arms to Taiwan and saying that those 1982 six assurances of Reagan were “a long time ago”. There are reasons to believe Trump cannot be trusted on this file. We have to be aware of that.

That's why we need more Canada.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: I agree that this G2 framing is a nightmare for many countries that are U.S. allies in the region—that the U.S. would acquiesce to the framing of a G2 with two great powers, the U.S. and China. Clearly, some of the atmospherics from this summit led to that impression.

The silver lining to this—and a caveat for those who are more concerned about it—is that there are multiple actors in the U.S., such as Congress, the Senate and different policy actors. I'm not convinced that some of the transactions that appear to have been made at that summit will be long-lasting. I think there's deep China skepticism in Washington.

If you want an example of this, the freedom of navigation operation that just happened in the South China Sea was a couple of weeks after the summit in China. There are examples of how the United States is not going to abandon all of its activities meant to deter Chinese adventurism in the region. I think that will continue.

Hon. Robert Oliphant: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will next go to Mr. Brunelle-Duceppe for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I think the three witnesses have told us just how important it is to keep security in mind when developing an Indo-Pacific strategy.

Mr. Miller, I think one of your recommendations—which was, in fact, one of the most important—was that we must keep national security in mind when engaging in international trade. That's what you were saying.

There was an agreement to purchase 49,000 Chinese electric vehicles in exchange for lower tariffs on canola. I'll give you a couple of examples of countries that have taken action regarding Chinese vehicles.

In Israel, the Ministry of Defense has suspended the use of Chinese electric vehicles for its senior officials. Furthermore, the country prohibits these vehicles from accessing military bases and confidential facilities for fear that the cameras and telemetry could transmit strategic data to Beijing.

In Poland, authorities have also put in place restrictions prohibiting Chinese electric cars from accessing military sites and critical infrastructure due to surveillance vulnerabilities.

In the United Kingdom, defence and security agencies have asked their staff not to park these vehicles near sensitive sites.

Here, several cybersecurity experts are saying that, with this agreement, Canada has prioritized commercial interests over national security.

Wouldn't that be extremely concerning? Shouldn't the government reconsider this kind of action when it enters into agreements with the Chinese Communist Party?

My question is for you, Mr. Miller, but I'd also like to hear what the other two witnesses have to say on this issue.

[*English*]

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: Thank you. It's an excellent question. Let me try to be very brief on it.

On the technical side of it, it's something we should be looking at very closely. It's something that is concerning to me, quite a bit—the potential that these vehicles could have elements that could be used for espionage and other purposes.

There's another element of this, though, which is looking at what the plan is post-47,000 cars. The idea that we need to make a transaction to get something else without a long-term plan for where we will be going forward—for example, with future potential imports of Chinese EVs—is a challenging thing, and I haven't heard a whole lot of articulation on this.

The final point is not to minimize the potential diplomatic costs of this. One example of this, I will say, is the relationship with Japan, which we have talked about before.

China is Japan's greatest geostrategic rival now, with some of the coercion that China is putting on Japan. Japan is one of our greatest and most reliable investors in Canada, including in Ontario. I don't think we want to minimize the potential to just say that we can mitigate that and can manage that risk. Increasingly, they will be watching moves like this, and that will impact and affect their potential investment flows into Canada.

● (1615)

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

[*English*]

Scott Simon: I'll answer in English.

The electric vehicle issue is very important. It's important to underline the fact that we have a choice to make. We already have a good relationship with automakers from Japan. We should be deepening our relationship with Japan, which is a democratic ally, and we need to have good, solid security chains with them.

I want to bring up another thing, which is the issue of human rights, because it is unclear how clean the supply chain is that goes into these electric vehicles. It could be that there is forced labour, with some of the Uyghur people who have been put into forced labour regimes involved in that. I think we need to stay very clear from even the possibility of that. That's my main concern.

Vina Nadjibulla: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I have one small point to add, which is similar to my colleague's.

I'm less worried about the 47,000 EVs that might be coming into Canada in the first year. I'm much more concerned about what else is being proposed by way of bringing in Chinese production to Canada, as well as China's role in the battery supply chain and even electrification more generally. I think this is part of a conversation that needs to go beyond that preliminary and provisional agreement.

There's been a lot of attention on 47,000 EVs versus canola. To me, that's just one small issue relative to what else is now potentially on the table: the attention that we need to pay to how our economic policies vis-à-vis China will fit into our overall industrial strategy and policies, what kind of economy Canada wants to have 10 or 15 years down the road and whether we want to have a manufacturing sector altogether.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Thank you.

Dr. Simon, you raised an important point, because a study by the University of Sheffield clearly shows that, within the supply chains required to manufacture these vehicles, there is forced labour involving people primarily from the Uyghur region, so from East Turkestan.

You talked about the agreement that Canada almost signed with Taiwan, which is a democratic, reliable ally with supply chains free of forced labour. The Department of Foreign Affairs representatives responded with a long silence when I asked them if the only reason we still haven't signed this agreement yet is to keep from upsetting Beijing. They didn't answer me. I think the silence was deafening.

I would like you to tell the committee how entering into an agreement with Taiwan would send a clear message. In addition, we wouldn't be the first to do so, because I think the United Kingdom already has a similar agreement with Taiwan.

Scott Simon: I think you've highlighted a number of very important points.

I completely agree with you: Silence speaks volumes here. It's crucial that the government sign this agreement very soon. We can't wait. It's very important for Canada.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Ziad, you're next. You have five minutes.

Ziad Aboultaif (Edmonton Manning, CPC): Thank you.

Thanks to the witnesses for appearing today.

If I heard correctly, you all talked about being strategic more than being tactical, and we have to walk into the relationship with China with eyes wide open. After the Prime Minister's visit and the announcement of increasing economic ties with China, including the 47,000 EVs coming into Canada and the other details that we don't know, do you believe that we are walking into this relationship with eyes wide open?

Vina Nadjibulla: I can start.

I think the rhetoric is correct in terms of having eyes wide open and having the various guardrails. The issue is going to be implementation and the kind of work that is under way to make sure that those guardrails exist and to make sure that we have the capacity and the resources to implement them.

Some of the early signs are not encouraging. We've spoken about Taiwan and what happened with the two Liberal MPs who were recalled. We've spoken about the Taiwan arrangement for trade that's still on the books. We've spoken about the issue of forced labour and how that has been handled when it comes to China.

I think we have to be careful not to change pragmatic engagement or selective engagement into basically complete acquiescence to everything that Beijing puts on the table. If the mark of success is that we have a relationship with no friction, that we basically try to manage it quietly, then we will be in dangerous territory, because the red lines will continue to shift. We will be at risk of undermining our long-term interests and values for the sake of potential short-term economic gain.

● (1620)

Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Simon, I'd like you to weigh in on this, please.

Scott Simon: Yes, I would like to add something to that, because I think something is going to happen very soon that will tell us where this government is heading. It is that HMCS *Charlottetown* has just left Vietnam, and in past years, when it's been leaving these exercises in the south, it's gone up through the Taiwan Strait. I think we need to watch carefully where the *Charlottetown* goes in the next two weeks. If we see a Taiwan Strait transit, it's a good sign that the guardrails are there and that the government has its eyes open, but if it makes a detour around the other side of Taiwan or through Japanese waters to get to Korea, then that would send us a sign that Canada is trying to appease China, and that would be very dangerous.

Ziad Aboultaif: Mr. Berkshire Miller, would you comment?

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: I'll be very quick.

I agree with my colleagues, and I would say that we need to stop talking in riddles as we do sometimes. An example of this is wishing that the status quo doesn't change. The reality is that the status quo has changed, and it is changing every minute, every hour, whether it's in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea or the East China Sea.

On the point about clarity of language and consistency, the Chinese will always say “megaphone diplomacy”, but we can't say we're doing quiet diplomacy and not talk about these issues. I think we need to be clear and consistent in our policy. That doesn't mean that we're disruptive and that we don't have a bilateral relationship with China, but I think we need to be very clear about this. We cannot censor our views when we see activities that have been quite destabilizing, especially in the maritime domain.

Ziad Aboultaif: Security comes before economy. I guess there's no economy without security. We've seen examples in multiple places in the past decades and recently, and we know that security issues caused by China are not just outside Canada and in the Indo-Pacific region. They're also in Canada. We still have police stations that operate in Canada, and that really brings concern to the communities of Canadians of Chinese descent.

What do you say to the government on the police stations? We've asked about this before. I've questioned the minister myself on this, and I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

Vina Nadjibulla: I'll start by noting that it would be important to make sure that the issue of foreign interference remains top of mind.

For 2023-24, because of the public inquiry into foreign interference, we had a lot of attention and understanding of what was happening. In the last year, because of everything else that's happening, this issue has gone on the back burner. We cannot afford that, because actors who are involved in foreign interference on Canadian soil—be they Russia, China, India, Iran or others—are not letting down their guard.

We cannot do that either. We need to move forward in implementing all the recommendations that exist. We have a good understanding of this issue, and we need to move forward on the implementation. We cannot afford to put it on the back burner because we now say that other issues are more important. We have to do multiple things at once, and that is one issue that fundamentally touches not just our democratic institutions but also the safety of Canadians on Canadian soil.

Ziad Aboultaif: Thank you. My time is up.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We next go to MP Clark. You have five minutes.

Braedon Clark (Sackville—Bedford—Preston, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. Thank you to our witnesses for your expertise and your testimony this afternoon.

Ms. Nadjibulla, something that stands out from all of your testimony today is the tension or the balance that needs to be struck between issues of economics and issues of security and geopolitics. Canada's problem as a middle power, if I can put it that way, is that we don't necessarily always have the economic or military might to dictate terms, especially in a region as large as the Indo-Pacific.

From the balance in 2022, what do we look at now? Are there areas in which we need to recalibrate, in your view, to strike that delicate balance?

Vina Nadjibulla: Thank you very much for the question.

In my statement and in the recommendations that I've made, I point out that there's a lot that Canada can do, including when it comes to energy. We are a middle power, but we are actually much more than a middle power. We're the 10th largest economy. We can be doing more and punching way above our weight in the region.

Energy is one thing, and there are things like AI, quantum.... What I'm trying to say is that we're not as vulnerable as some of our partners. Japan, Australia and others trade much more with China and are much more integrated into the Chinese supply chain in the region, so they are much more open to coercion.

Only about 5% of our exports go to China. We're trying to deepen that, but we have to recognize that we are not as vulnerable to coercion as Japan, Australia and others in the region. Therefore, we need to be much more confident, show up with confidence, understand what our strengths are—energy, both conventional and clean energy, as well as niche technology.

Quantum is an area in which we can really be leading right now, and there's a lot of appetite in the region to engage with us, with AI, critical minerals.... My point is that, yes, it's a challenging moment in which we have to do multiple things at once, but we should also really lean into our strengths and make sure that our friends are with us.

The conversation shouldn't be just about China. China is an important actor, but we should be doing a lot more with Japan, a lot more with Australia. I'm delighted to say that, in the last year, there has been much more strategic engagement with Australia than ever before. We might be strategic cousins, but we're not yet strategic partners, and that's something that needs to change right away.

In short, I would say that the tension is there, but Canada is in a much better position than we give ourselves credit for.

● (1625)

Braedon Clark: Mr. Simon and Mr. Miller, if you want to touch on that briefly as well, you can.

Scott Simon: I'll be very brief about that.

Japan is a very important partner because it is so close. It has so much trade with China, yet people are very much aware of the risks. We really need to deepen our relationship with Japan. With all the issues we just talked about, I think that it would be a good idea to see how much we can do with Japan.

We could even make it a formal alliance, as we had 100 years ago. There was the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. We need to go back to something like that, which could include the U.K., Australia and New Zealand.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: I'll be very brief, too.

Japan, of course, is an important partner, but I'd point to the Philippines. One of the notable developments recently is Canada's signing on to the Luzon corridor with other like-minded partners. This is about creating and defining secure supply chains for critical minerals, etc.

There are a number of different partners that we could be working with. The idea is not that one partner or a couple of partners will replace the U.S. I think we have to get that notion out of our heads. There are ways that we can diversify with like-minded partners, but I think it's about having a couple of these partners that can help our supply chains.

Braedon Clark: Thank you. I wanted to touch on another nation that hasn't come up yet in the meeting, and that's India.

Ms. Nadjibulla, I'm not sure if this was from your submission, but you mentioned that there have been some clear achievements on India. I think that's a significant change, given where we were in 2022, without saying more than that.

Could all of you, in the time we have left—about a minute—give us your thoughts on where that relationship sits and how this figures into the broader picture of the region?

Vina Nadjibulla: We are seeing a fundamental reset in the relationship, which is good news and will serve Canada's national interests. It's a relationship that will still need to have a lot of attention. The CEPA we're negotiating, the comprehensive economic partnership agreement, will be a really good framework for us to engage with India.

We have to be realistic about how much work we still need to do to raise our India competence. Basically, picture us where we were with China 15 years ago. That's where we are with India now in terms of our understanding of India's significance in the region, India's rise globally and our own capacity to engage. It's a relationship with a lot of complementarity from an economic perspective. It's underutilized. I think CEPA will give us the framework to engage. We have to do a lot more here at home in dealing with our India competence, as well as in addressing the difficult issues that are still there around foreign interference and law enforcement.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We go next to MP Brunelle-Duceppe for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Dr. Simon, there's been a lot of talk about nation states, but not much about indigenous peoples. I'd like you to tell us whether it's possible for Canada to do more to address the challenges faced by indigenous peoples within the framework of this Indo-Pacific strategy.

Scott Simon: I think you know that this is something I'm very interested in. Indigenous peoples already play an important role in the strategy, and I think it should stay that way. I'm very pleased to tell you that there are ongoing exchanges between the indigenous peoples of Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines and Canada, precisely because of this Indo-Pacific strategy. I contribute to that, because I'm involved in exchanges between indigenous peoples on both sides.

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Today, I met with people representing the Rohingya. We're currently being told that there is a massive amount of human trafficking. Right now, people—specifically girls and women—are being sent straight to brothels. There are also girls, men and boys who are currently in the fishing industry.

In the Indo-Pacific strategy, to what extent do we recognize that in many places on this continent, products in supply chains are the result of forced labour? To what extent is Canada's current legislation insufficient with regard to forced labour?

Ms. Nadjibulla, perhaps you could start.

● (1630)

[*English*]

Vina Nadjibulla: As part of the Indo-Pacific strategy, we are doing more in the region in collaboration with law enforcement, including on the issues that you raised, especially in Southeast Asia when it comes to Myanmar and other parts. It's part of the review of the strategy. There will need to be consideration about how the strategy will be organized—its various pillars—and where these issues will come in, because there are the law enforcement partnerships that various departments are engaged in, but there is also the developmental component in supporting those communities. The humanitarian relief component was also part of the strategy, and the government will need to decide what kinds of priorities will be allocated in the next phase.

I can say that in the first phase of IPS, there has been programming, including in Southeast Asia, around those issues.

[*Translation*]

Alexis Brunelle-Duceppe: Shouldn't Canada's Indo-Pacific strategy include much stronger legislation regarding the entry into Canada of products resulting from forced labour? Shouldn't national legislation be part of the Indo-Pacific strategy?

[*English*]

Vina Nadjibulla: If I'm understanding correctly, you're asking what kinds of provisions we will have to prevent trafficking into Canada—law enforcement around trafficking. It would be up to the government. My advice would be not to bring that into the Indo-Pacific strategy but rather to have it as part of an overall understanding of how the strategy connects to foreign policy and domestic priorities.

The Chair: Thank you.

Next, we go to MP Michael Chong for five minutes.

Hon. Michael Chong: We're talking about the Indo-Pacific and the government's approach to the Indo-Pacific. The PRC's foreign minister will be in town this week. What would be your advice to the government about what should be brought up in the bilateral meeting between Canada's foreign minister and the PRC's foreign minister?

I would like an answer from each of you, please.

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: Going back to my consistency point, think about some of the interests that we've outlined in the Indo-Pacific. We've talked about some of our support for like-minded democracies—our support, for example, for the arbitral ruling in the South China Sea—and some of our operations in the region, as my colleagues mentioned.

I'm not saying that we should throw those in the face of the Chinese foreign minister when he's here, but by no means do I think that we should backtrack on them. That's one important part. We can't be meek and let the agenda be framed by the Chinese side.

The second point that I would make—and I think a lot of us remember, famously or infamously, what happened the last time the Chinese foreign minister was visiting—is that we cannot allow such things to happen in our democracy. Perhaps he has learned his lesson, but that's an example of something I hope does not happen.

Hon. Michael Chong: Are you referencing when he berated a Canadian journalist?

Jonathan Berkshire Miller: Yes, exactly.

Vina Nadjibulla: My understanding of this visit, Mr. Chair, is that it's about building trust and deepening the new strategic partnership. What will be important, especially in how the Canadian government speaks about it publicly, is not to fall into China's rhetoric, the PRC's rhetoric. We need to stay strong and clear on what Canada wishes to achieve through this new strategic partnership, what's in it and what's not in it. I think the atmosphere and the mood that the PRC would like to project is that we have completely turned the page and that there is absolutely nothing that is an issue, that there are no tensions or disagreements and that there is alignment. I don't think that is accurate.

The challenge for our government, in my view, will be to advance the interests that Canada would like to advance while also maintaining strategic clarity on the limits and the guardrails that we have—and not to fall into the paradigms and the rhetoric that China will be presenting.

Scott Simon: It's clear that there's a difference between a strategic partnership and a comprehensive strategic partnership. I hope that the meeting goes smoothly and is cordial on both sides, but it is important for Canada—perhaps outside of the meeting and after the meeting—to make it clear to the Canadian public that we want to have a peaceful and continuing relationship with the People's Republic of China but are aware of ongoing problems, including its aggression towards neighbouring states and human rights issues. These are things we can't bring up, realistically, with the foreign minister, but they do need to be communicated to the Canadian public.

● (1635)

Hon. Michael Chong: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: We go next to MP Anita Vandenbeld.

I understand that you're sharing your time with MP Sari.

Anita Vandenbeld (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to all of our witnesses.

I have a quick question for you, Ms. Nadjibulla. You mentioned that there were universities and that this kind of university academic cultural diplomacy is very useful. I have a constituent, Varavadi Monaghan, who translated the *Anne of Green Gables* series into the Thai language. Now, because of her efforts, Thai universities are using it as part of their world literature curriculum.

Can you tell us why it would be important for us to support those kinds of efforts?

Vina Nadjibulla: That's a great question, and it allows me to share that there are many such examples. Our universities and the fact that so many people have come and studied in Canada.... That's a huge asset for Canadian soft power in the region. We need to do a lot more to properly utilize that and to be much more strategic about that.

So much of the discussion has been focused on foreign students. That's only one piece of it. The region is really dynamic, and we can be doing a lot more in joint research partnerships. India is an area in which this comes out, but it's also in Southeast Asia. I think there needs to be a much more concerted effort to have a public conversation with Canada about the importance of universities and of the services sector, the dynamic partnerships that now exist for us in the region, and the enormous asset that we have through this alumni network of people who have studied in Canada and who are now all over the region in positions of influence, including in business.

This could advance people-to-people ties, as well as commercial interests. We can go a long way in attracting investment and business opportunities by utilizing that network as well.

Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Sari, you have the floor.

Abdelhaq Sari (Bourassa, Lib.): I will continue along the same lines with my question, Mr. Chair.

My colleague spoke of academic diplomacy. I find that very relevant, and we could really strengthen it.

I could also mention diaspora diplomacy, because you spoke about people coming to settle here. Could you offer us advice on how to work with the diaspora here, in order to strengthen this knowledge, this co-operation, and ties with the Indo-Pacific region?

[*English*]

Vina Nadjibulla: You're absolutely right. We have a tremendous resource. When I speak about Asia competence, a key part of that is cultural and language abilities. We do have a rich diaspora community—for instance, a one-million-strong Filipino Canadian community—that can play an active role as we deepen relations.

Oftentimes, members of the diaspora are also part of the chambers of commerce and business associations, and they're some of the first ones to go into new markets. For instance, we just signed a CEPA with Indonesia, and we're hoping that the chamber of commerce and the Indonesian Canadians can be part of that effort as well.

I would also like to note that it needs to be a whole-of-Canada approach. Obviously, we need to draw on the talents of our diaspora community, but we cannot exercise foreign policy through diaspora only. We need to make sure that our universities and Canadians travel to the region much more and take advantage of the scholarships that are available through the Indo-Pacific strategy. This becomes a whole-of-nation, whole-of-society effort.

[*Translation*]

Abdelhaq Sari: I think that those who follow our work find that there's a certain challenge in the Indo-Pacific region, where countries have to choose between China and the United States. We can understand this polarization in that way, but people who follow our work are wondering what the choice would be or which of these two countries is more important.

How can Canada position itself as a fairly significant player, as a stakeholder that should be taken into consideration, that would demonstrate a certain neutrality and that could hold a fairly solid position?

Anyone can answer the question.

[*English*]

Vina Nadjibulla: If you want to come in, I'm happy to....

[*Translation*]

Scott Simon: I'll answer that.

In fact, it's very dangerous to frame the issue in terms of competition between the United States and China, because there are many other players in the world, including Canada, Japan and others.

I think it's more a matter of choosing between two societies, one of which is open and demonstrates respect for human rights, international law and the international and universal values that align with this spirit. We need to support like-minded partners, such as Japan or Taiwan, among others. It's not just China and the United States. There are also the Philippines and other countries.

● (1640)

Abdelhaq Sari: If I understand correctly, this would be a coalition or a group.

Scott Simon: Yes, it would be a group. However, it would not be an alliance with the United States, but rather support for democratic values and human rights everywhere, which could also include China. So it excludes no one.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Thank you so much to all the witnesses for appearing before the committee today, for your flexibility and for your help in making this discussion possible. We really appreciate it. Thank you very much, once again.

We will now proceed in camera for the second portion of the meeting. We are suspended.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]